DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 644 EC 302 207

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TITLE Restructuring the School: Additional Policy Issues and Options.
INSTITUTION Council of Administrators of Special Education, Inc.; Maryland Univ., College Park.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 23p.; For an earlier statement of "Issues and Options" and a related document, see ED 350 774 and ED 357 533, respectively.
AVAILABLE FROM The CASE Research Committee, Indiana University, Smith Research Center, Suite 100A, 2805 E. 10th St., Bloomington, IN 47405 ($10).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Cooperation; *Disabilities; *Educational Policy; *Educational Responsibility; Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; Financial Support; Policy Formation; Role of Education; *School Restructuring; *Special Education; Teacher Certification; Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

This report outlines issues related to special education and changes in its role brought about by the restructuring of schools. Discussions of proposed policy options accompany the descriptions of each issue. The issues are in addition to those described in an earlier University of Maryland issues and policy options paper. The first issue is stakeholder responsibility, which calls for viewing the education of all students as a shared responsibility and recommends the establishment of community partnerships. Consideration of the second issue, integrated community services for students with disabilities and their families, points out the difficulty in meeting the needs of vulnerable children and the essential need for interagency coordination. Discussion of the third issue, educational technology, examines the role of technology in improving treatment of students as individuals, the need for staff training in technology use, and the value of distance technology in sustaining inclusion. Suggestions regarding the fourth issue, teacher preparation and certification, include re-examining the course of study leading to a teaching degree and preparing all teachers to be responsible for the education of all students. Recommendations concerning the fifth issue, funding, focus on revising funding policies to meet the needs of school restructuring efforts and to make funding more flexible. (JDD)

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# CASE Research Issues & Policy Options

## Discussion of the Issues & Options

"We have traveled a long distance in the last decade—but we are being pressed to move much faster by the public, policy makers, and the needs of our students... Those of us who are veterans of earlier changes and innovations know both the pain and the possibility of restructuring."

Berreth, Diane. 1992. Special Education Leadership REVIEW, [illegible])

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CASE Research Committee

1992

■ The Future of Specialized Educational Services ■
for Students with Disabilities

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■ Building A Future Agenda for the ■
Education of Students with Disabilities

# Additional Policy Issue & Options

Restructuring the School


**Prepared by**

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# Introduction ■

**"Restructuring is an effort to try to change the basic beliefs about the nature of schooling and it's practices."**

Albert Shanker

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The restructuring of our nation's schools has exposed a number of issues related to special education and its changing role. In this document the CASE Research Committee has outlined several of these issues which are in addition to those described in the University of Maryland issues and policy options paper. Along with a description of each additional issue are discussions of proposed policy options for those new issues.

It is important to have read the policy issues and options paper published by the University of Maryland before reading this document. As you read these CASE Research issues and policy options, additional issues and options will, hopefully, come to mind.

A response booklet is available which will assist in your discussions of CASE Research identified issues and options. This response booklet also allows you the opportunity to explain additional issues and options that you feel are important.

If you complete the summary sheet at the back of the response booklet and return it to the CASE Research Committee your input will be considered in the on-going debate regarding the future of special education in our schools.

# Stakeholder Responsibility

As communities grow, their make-up becomes more diverse. Inclusive communities accept and nurture this diversity which adds richness and fullness to their makeup. This diversity also adds challenges to communities to learn to live with differences in an ever changing world. Just as schools are realizing the importance of collaboration and cooperation in the education of their diverse population, so must communities in which the schools exist adopt similar attitudes and behaviors. Community support and involvement in the education of youth is essential for continuation of the culture as well as for improvement in the community's quality of life. All community members have a stake in the education of a child and must realize the responsibility which accompanies this role. A communal agenda which advocates principles of life-long learning and supporting the common good are critical.

## 1. The education of all students needs to become a shared responsibility.

- From pre-school to adult life, all students are preparing to assume their role in the larger community.
- All community members are stakeholders and potential team members in the planning and implementing of the education of its younger members.

## 2. Community partnerships need to be established.

- Job training, housing, supported employment, mentoring and volunteering are all important services that the community can provide.
- The input of all stakeholders, particularly parents, should be valued and encouraged.

## Discussion of Options

Issue 1:

Stakeholder Responsibility

All community members are stakeholders and may be called upon to assist in making and implementing decisions regarding the education of all students, including those with disabilities.

All people regardless of age, race, gender, or disability have a niche in the life of a community. All must be able to participate in this community and be considered when decisions regarding education are made.

- How are the roles of constituents changing in your community?
- How can community members work with the school in productive ways?
- How much re-education is necessary to assist stakeholders in understanding the restructuring process and the belief systems of schools?

## Policy - Option 1

All stakeholders are responsible for the education of all students

This option would require all parents and other community members to be actively involved in the education of students. Roles may include providing information, providing access to jobs, collaborating on important educational decisions or assisting with implementation of these decisions. Schools would form partnerships with community members to provide quality, on-going education for all students.

## Assumptions

This policy assumes that parents, other community members, and school personnel value each other's opinions and contributions and are able to form strong partnerships. It also assumes that all members of a community accept their responsibility for the education of its younger members.

## Strategies for Implementation

Communication is a critical factor in adopting this policy. Schools must play a significant role in encouraging community members to become involved in the education of students.

## Implications

Schools must be open to stakeholder involvement and share the responsibility of making educational decisions and implementing them. As a result, stronger, more cohesive communities evolve that support schools and feel ownership in raising productive, successful community members.

# ISSUE 2

## Integrated Community Services for Students with Disabilities and Their Families

Where education begins and ends continues to be the subject of political sparring. Regardless, in most communities, education's responsibilities as well as community mental health, public health, career development, job training, supportive employment, social services, and justice system responsibilities can be determined. The key issues become the access to and the coordination of these services. One critical problem with related agency services lies in the process by which clients become eligible for their help. Students with special needs may require assistance from several community agencies. For each agency, clients must endure a separate eligibility assessment before the service can be provided. These multiple assessments are often redundant, costly, and extremely time consuming. One assessment system accepted by all agencies, would provide a more efficient eligibility procedure.

Once a student becomes eligible for agency services, the issue then becomes one of access. Services need to be provided in places easily accessible to students, preferably in or near the school itself.

The final issue is one of coordination between and collaboration among all community agencies and the school. All parties must agree on the services needed for each child. Collaboration which focuses on these services and how they will be funded is critical. Coordination of these services would assist in scheduling, monitoring, and communication between all parties involved.

### 1. Given the socio-economic conditions and energies of most vulnerable families, reaching the needs of vulnerable children is extremely difficult

- Models of integrated site delivery systems are emerging as an alternative to the compartmentalized and fractionated system of delivery to students with disabilities and their families.

- Schools should encourage community agency participation at the school site to increase access and coordination of services.

**2. Interagency coordination is essential to the success of a student with special needs**

- State and local policies should be developed which would assist interagency collaboration and coordination.

- Special service personnel need to participate in organizing community mental, physical, health, justice, and social service discussions in order to plan and build new models of integrated services.

## Discussion of Options

### Issue 2

### Integrated Community Services for Students with Disabilities and Their Families

In order to provide an appropriate education for a student with disabilities a collaborative, coordinated effort is essential; not just between school personnel, but among all agencies (including health, social services, and justice systems) providing services to students and their families. Policies need to be adopted which outline appropriate methods for coordinating all services.

*Key Questions:*

- What school districts and agencies have succeeded in coordinating community service and how has it been accomplished?

- What strategies for interaction between multiple parties are most effective?

- How can services be streamlined within and among agencies?

## Policy - Option 1

Integrated community services

This option requires key personnel from all agencies to come together to view the student as a whole. A community agency forum made up of individuals who could make decisions and allocate funds would review individual student needs and agree upon a service delivery plan. Family intervention problems that are affecting school performance and community adjustment could be brought to this forum for assistance.

## Assumptions

This option assumes that the agencies involved would be willing to work together in a cooperative, collaborative manner. It would also assume that those individuals attending the forum would be authorized to commit resources and make decisions as needed.

## Strategies for Implementation

Community service agencies would need to revise their current delivery system. Referral and diagnostic procedures would need to be altered. Forum members would need to be well informed on the availability of resources and be given authority to make decisions on behalf of the agency.

## Implications

The forum would allow for streamlining and coordination of services. All parties could agree on the diagnostic information needed, if any, and eligibility could be decided immediately. Agencies would be able to collaborate and develop an integrated community service plan. Coordination of services would be an on-going process.

## Policy - Option 2

Site-based coordination for all services to special needs students and their families

This policy builds on the integrated community service policy option and requires schools and community agencies to work together to provide comprehensive services to students in need. All referrals would be screened by a site-based team made up of a representative sampling of community agencies and school personnel. The team would review each referral and submit it to the appropriate agency for action. All services would be available at a common location, preferably the school itself, which would provide easy access for all students.

### Assumptions

This policy assumes that all parties are willing to develop one method of screening and referral. It also assumes that school and/or community agencies would be willing to work with a coordination team and that the lines of communication between all service agents would remain open. It assumes that schools and agencies work closely to provide coordinated, integrated services to all who need them.

### Strategies for Implementation

Schools would need to investigate other communities providing site-based management of all services. Funding services would need to be explored and referral procedures reviewed. Membership on the coordination team would be agreed upon by all parties involved. Communication between the site-based team and the agencies would be on-going.

### Implications

All agencies would be giving up some control of their own programs and services. The coordination team would work with individual agencies, but agencies may need to collaborate with each other in allocating resources or planning. The school would need to work with community agencies in finding a common site for providing services. On-going coordination and communication would be essential.

# ISSUE 3

## Educational Technology

Current technological advances greatly enhance teaching and learning. Computer assisted instruction and learning, adaptive and assistive devices, and technology which manages information systems and student programs have become resources for schools. With the ever-increasing technology, a whole new world of opportunities opens up to those who, in the past, may have been considered non-communicative, unable to learn, or inappropriate for school. Technology becomes a means by which students can be included in all aspects of schooling. It can also become a means of collaboration and cooperation and can assist in evaluation and accountability processes. As more students with multiple disabilities continue to arrive at the schoolhouse door the need for assistive devices increases. Also, with this ever increasing technology comes the opportunity for easier management of individual programs and greater access to information.

### 1. The increasing use of technology and information networks will improve the capacity of school systems to treat all students as individuals

- Maintaining an awareness of developing technology and its use with all students is a new and on-going task of district leadership and instructional personnel.
- Easy access to information regarding specific disabilities will assist the development of individual education plans.
- Assistive technology in the hands of student allows them to be educated more appropriately and increases their potential for social interaction with their peers.

2. **Staff training in the use of evolving technologies is more important than the investment made in the technology itself.**

- Educators need to be well informed about computer assisted instruction, assistive technology, and management of program outcomes as well as student information systems.

- Because of the ever-changing nature of technology, educators must continually update their knowledge in this area.

3. **Distance technology to unite students placed in more restrictive environments with their age appropriate classrooms is a viable option for sustaining inclusion.**

- Homebound students or those in more restrictive settings continue to be participating members of the classroom through the use of technology.

- Though this technology would link students to their classrooms, caution in using this to justify exclusion from a classroom needs to be exercised.

## Discussion of Options

Issue 3:

Educational Technology

With the ever-increasing possibilities brought about by educational technology comes the need for responsible policies. These policies will direct the use of technology in a manner beneficial to the student, the educators, and other service providers.

*Key Questions:*

- How can technology be used to provide the greatest benefit for students with special needs?

- How can we ensure that technology will be used appropriately and ethically?

## Policy - Option 1

All students and staff have access to and training in appropriated technology.

This option would encourage the use of technology to support instruction, provide assistive devices, manage information and manage student programs. It would also allow for appropriate training for all who use technology. If students are removed from classrooms due to physical or emotional reasons, they could still remain connected the classroom activities. Those students who have difficulty communicating could remain in classrooms with assistive devices. Technology could also be used to provide better support, collaboration, and planning of student programs as well as provide assistance in evaluation and accountability procedures.

## Assumptions

This option assumes that schools will support the use of technology and will make it available as needed. It also assumes the schools and state departments of education will work together to keep current on technology development and will provide opportunities for teachers to remain knowledgeable of technological advances.

## Strategies for Implementation

Schools will need to explore funding options for providing this technological assistance. Also, technical assistance in the use of new technology will need to be provided. School districts will need to provide time and staff to investigate the use of technology.

## Implications

As technology improves so rapidly, systems become quickly obsolete and need continual updating. Students will be able to benefit and participate far more in the educational process. Schools must realize their responsibility to use technology for collaboration and inclusion purposes and not for exclusion of students with disabilities.

# ISSUE 4

# Teacher Preparation/ Certification

Institutions of higher education and state departments of education are re-examining their preparation and certification requirements in terms of their capacity to help all graduates understand their roles in the education of all students. Both special and regular education preparation programs need to conceptualize the differences in educating special needs students with their peers. Higher education and certification departments need to look at the restructuring efforts and the redefining of the workplace. Schools can no longer be seen as a series of isolated classrooms. They have become or are becoming collaborative learning environments that serve heterogeneous groups of youngsters in a variety of ways. Schools require teachers to understand individual differences and learning styles and to be able to use a variety of teaching strategies. Teacher preparation programs and State Certification Departments can no longer ignore the changes that are occurring in our nation's schools.

## 1. Higher education needs to re-examine the course of study and the delivery systems which lead to a teaching degree

- Teachers are entering restructured environments where they are required to work with a diverse population in a collaborative way.
- Teachers are required to work in collaborative, consultative or team teaching situations and need to be prepared appropriately.
- Higher education needs to adequately prepare students to work in these new environments, through teaching and modeling the approaches they wish to teach.

**2. Certification needs to accommodate the restructuring efforts and prepare all teachers to work with and be responsible for the education of all students.**

- Current general education certification and recertification needs to be evaluated in light of restructuring and reaching the needs of diverse learners.

## Discussion of Options

Issue 4:

Teacher Preparation/Certification

If educators, both regular and special, work together to meet the needs of disabled students, then teacher preparation must adequately prepare them and teacher certification must allow this to occur. Policies need to be developed that will encourage higher education institutions to change preparation as well as state departments of education to change their certification requirements.

*Key Questions:*

- What type of certification is necessary for regular classroom teachers?
- Do you need special certification to serve special students?
- Does certification allow all teachers to work together or does it hinder that process?

## Policy - Option 1

Teachers as Generalists

This policy would require teachers to function as general educators of all students assigned to them. Classroom teachers would be responsible for their students regardless of their diverse needs.

## Assumptions

This policy assumes that all teachers would be educated to deal with a variety of student needs at various age levels. Schools of higher education would provide future teachers with a variety of student needs at various age levels. Schools of higher education would provide future teachers with a variety of instructional and behavioral strategies that would allow them to work successfully with all students including those with disabilities.

## Strategies for Implementation

Schools of higher education would need to revamp teacher training programs in light of the change in teacher expectations and merge special and regular education programs. State departments of certification would need to do away with categorical certification.

## Implications

Teachers would be able to work with all students including those with disabilities and be responsible for their education.

## Policy - Option 2

Specialized education personnel certification

This policy would create a consulting specialist certification which could only be obtained after receiving a "Generalist" certification. A teacher who has been prepared to work in a classroom with the general population may decide to continue his/her education and receive a consulting specialist certificate. Within this specialist certification special endorsements could be received for sensory impairments (teachers of the deaf/hearing impaired and teacher of the blind).

## Assumptions

This policy assumes that a specialist certification is necessary during a transitional phase of our educational system. As teachers become more adept at dealing with diverse student needs, these specialist certifications may no longer be necessary.

## Strategies for Implementation

Schools of higher education could continue to provide all future teachers with a variety of instructional and behavioral strategies while continuing to offer courses in specialized areas. Certification would be a two tiered system with all teachers receiving a "Generalist" certification before qualifying for a "Specialist" license.

## Implications

Regular classroom teachers would be expected to educate all students assigned to their classroom. "Specialists" would be available for consultation and collaboration as needed.

## Policy - Option 3

Instructional Assistant Certification

All paraprofessionals who work with students will be required to be trained or will demonstrate knowledge through experience and will be certified as instructional assistants.

## Assumptions

This policy assumes that instructional assistants are valuable, responsible members of an instructional team and are willing to be properly trained to work with all students regardless of their differences.

## Strategies for Implementation

Universities, community colleges, and local training efforts would need to collaborate on certification standards.

## Implications

Paraprofessional training would be formalized and would provide necessary information for individuals who work with an instructional team.

# Funding

During restructuring an issue in the minds of administrators, teachers, board members, and tax payers is funding. How much will new programs and delivery systems cost? What are the funding sources? What will need to be added to the budget? What will be cut? Though these questions arise, restructuring should be seen as a shifting of resources and allocations and not the addition or reduction in funds.

Special education funding is particularly complicated with multiple sources and countless reporting requirements. With changes in the way services are delivered, there must be changes in the way they are funded and the way the funds are managed.

## 1. Local, State, and Federal policy makers need to revise their funding policies to meet the needs of school restructuring efforts

- Funding could reward integrated services, not more restrictive placements.
- States can establish local funding patterns on the basis of total enrollment. Provisions for districts that fall out of the average could be accommodated.

## 2. Restructuring requires flexible use of funds

- The blending of categorical funding across specialized program areas should be encouraged to better meet the needs of individual students.

## Strategies for Implementation

State departments will need to examine this funding option which will not be based on the number of students with disabilities (or types of disabilities) that are educated by local districts. Input from local districts could assist states in developing appropriate funding procedures.

## Implications

School districts who have been practicing inclusion will no longer be penalized. Schools will not be required to identify students as disabled in order to receive the funds needed to educate them. Funding would be based on services provided, not identified disabilities.

## Discussion of Options

Issue 5:

Funding

The funding of restructuring efforts is critical to their success. Without a careful review of funding mechanisms, changes in special education cannot and will not occur. Allocation and management procedures must be outlined. Policies need to be developed which will direct these procedures.

*Key Questions:*

- How will funds be allocated? Will they be based on individuals served or on services provided?

- Who will manage the funds and who will receive the benefit of these sources? Will central office personnel still manage funding or will individual schools be responsible?

## Policy - Option 1

Funding that supports inclusion

In this option funding would be equitably allocated and districts who are practicing inclusion would not be penalized. Funding mechanisms could be based on ADM/ADA (total school population, not special education student headcount) with special reimbursement or support for extremely high cost individuals. Allowances could also be negotiated for special district circumstances (towns with high numbers of students in residential placements, group homes, mental hospitals, etc.).

## Assumptions

This policy assumes that all communities have essentially the same percentages of students with disabilities. It also assumes that extenuating circumstances may exist and allowances will be made as needed. It also assumes that state departments are willing to change the funding mechanisms that currently exist.

# More from the CASE Research Committee ■

The University of Maryland and the CASE Research Committee have developed four documents which will assist educators in developing policies for their districts.

The first two papers, Issues and Options in Restructuring Schools and Special Education and CASE Research Issues and Policy Options, describe current special education issues such as Developing a Clear Vision, Organizational Restructuring, Curriculum, Accountability Systems, Staff Development, Funding, Technology, and others. Various policy options for each issue are proposed.

The third document is a Response Booklet which summarizes each issue and option and can be used as a "workbook" for developing specific policies for your schools.

The final document is the CASE Future Agenda: Creating a Unified Education System which outlines CASE's vision for the future of education for all students.

The documents are offered as a package (set of 4 books) for $30.00 or each document can be ordered separately for $10.00 a copy. Bulk rates are available for 25 copies or more.

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